"Frankly, Doctor McCoy...."

"Don't 'Doctor' me, Thuau! Spit it out!"

"...in the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate, the Good, I haven't the foggiest idea We'll just have to take it as it comes."

His hearts beat steadily, both of them, four times a minute. Twice a minute he breathed. The rest of his body sat/lay inert on the hard dry earth of Beta Cassiopiae IV. He was vaguely conscious of it, as he was conscious of the doctors' muttered exchanges, McCoy's ceaseless pacing, the intravenous needle suddenly jammed into his arm. Damn, take it easy, that hurts. No it doesn't. Pain is a thing of the mind. The mind controls. Doesn't it? The heart is not a logical organ.

Spock....

?????

I love you.

I could never say it....

You don't need to.

I do.

Illogical.

Most logical. I love you, Jim.

Again Spock approached him, gently this time. Again he was held fast, though now the touch of the other mind was a pleasure so intense it was almost pain, and through it, mingled with desire, he felt a lingering fear of rejection that wrenched at his heart. There was a brief sensation of something like free fall, and the darkness gave way to a night sky where stars spilled across the zenith and into the deep mirror of the sea like the overflow of a fountain. A breeze brought them the scent of green things growing on the rising hills behind them, mixed with the salt tang of the water that slipped with the sound of silk over the white sand beach where they lay together. They were naked.

"You're sure?"

"Yes."

"I don't want to hurt you."

"I want you."

Jim laid a hand on Spock's shoulder, lean and strangely, excitingly, hot to his touch. He reached up to stroke the smooth cap of black hair, then let his fingers trail across the curly mat of the other's chest and down his body. Spock caught his breath sharply; Jim smiled and kissed him lightly. Fingers parted, Spock traced the lines of Jim's face, forehead, cheekbones, lips that pulsed against his hand until his own mouth found them, then parted to make him welcome. Slowly, thoroughly, with painstaking tenderness, they explored each other's bodies, gaining and giving knowledge. Spock learned quickly. His hands, hot with the fires of Vulcan's suns, strayed over smooth chest and flank, gently across groin and tautening thigh.

"Spock...." The word was half-gasp, half-moan.

Spock shifted his weight and turned, his body moving smoothly against his lover's, heightening desire almost unbearably. Warmer than human arms closed about Jim's hips as his mouth sought the heat of Spock's hardening flesh. They came together, exploding in a white intensity that burned away the last divisions between them. For the first time, he--Jim, Spock, human, Vulcan, any and all of the above--was a whole being, perfect and complete. Strength met and balanced weakness; virtue, fault; knowledge, ignorance. He was creator and created, one and indivisible.

"Can't you bring him out of it?"

"I'm not sure it would be a good idea to try. Normally, he should initiate the process himself.

"The Captain needs surgery, Thuau. And God only knows what would happen if we tried to operate with him in this state. Not to mention the effect that might have on Spock."

"Captain Kirk is stabilized."